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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3419
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2277
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2397
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0922
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1674
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2030
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2451
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4883
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1546
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000819

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR G. GARLAND
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ZI
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY CONTROL OF PARLIAMENT AT RISK

REF: A. HARARE 730
 1B. HARARE 741

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The one-seat advantage MDC-Tsvangirai maintains over ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe's House of Assembly is at stake in upcoming by-elections for two vacant parliamentary seats. Matobo North in Matabeleland is likely to be a closely contested campaign, while the Gokwe-Gumunu seat in Midlands will probably remain squarely in ZANU-PF's camp. Although there have not yet been reports of regime-directed intimidation, ZANU-PF has begun mobilizing in Matobo-North. Additionally, two MDC-T parliamentarians remain in police custody, awaiting hearings before the High Court. END SUMMARY.

ZANU-PF and MDC-T Evenly Matched in Assembly

12. (SBU) When Lovemore Moyo was elected Speaker of the House of Assembly on August 25 (reftel A) the MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) parliamentarian was forced to relinquish his Matobo North seat in Zimbabwe's Parliament, triggering what is expected to be a hotly contested campaign in Matabeleland South. With the loss of Moyo's seat, the MDC-T currently has a single-seat advantage over ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe's lower house. MDC-T is reduced to 99 seats and ZANU-PF has 98 seats. This slight advantage is negated by the lone "independent" Jonathan Moyo, who is expected to vote along ZANU-PF lines.

13. (SBU) The MDC-Mutambara faction (MDC-M) has 10 seats and will continue to be a determining factor for control of Parliament. It appears that seven or eight of these MPs defied Arthur Mutambara on August 25 and voted for Lovemore Moyo to be the House Speaker. Despite that vote, uncertainty

remains about the longer-term voting strategies of this bloc, making the by-elections for the two vacant Matobo North and Gokwe-Gumunyu seats critically important. Dates for the by-elections are expected to be announced shortly.

Matobo North Race Close; Increasing ZANU Activity

¶ 14. (SBU) Just as in the case of the Assembly, control of Matobo North will probably be determined by what the MDC-M decides to do. Should MDC-M choose to field a candidate in Matobo North, the MDC vote would be split which might result in a ZANU-PF victory. In the March election, Lovemore Moyo won his seat by a margin of only about 400 votes. In that election, the MDC-M ran a candidate who finished third, but had a strong showing. While the MDC-M's intentions are as of yet unknown to us, it is a given that the MDC-T will be challenged to find as senior and well-known a candidate to campaign as Lovemore Moyo.

¶ 15. (C) In recognition of the importance of Matobo North, ZANU-PF has begun preparing for the campaign. In a meeting on September 4 between the Ambassador and Lovemore Moyo, the newly-elected Speaker warned that while currently there was not any violence or intimidation in Matobo, ZANU-PF was mobilizing in the region. Justina Mukoko, director of the independent NGO Zimbabwe Peace Project, confirmed that their monitors had seen ZANU-PF organizers setting up bases in Matobo North.

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Gokwe Seat Likely to Remain ZANU-PF

¶ 16. (SBU) The seat in Gokwe-Gumunyu, that was vacated by the death of ZANU-PF MP Ephrem Mushoriwa is expected to remain in ZANU hands following the upcoming by-election. In the March 29 election, Mushoriwa easily carried Gokwe-Gumunyu with 56 percent of the vote to the MDC-T candidate's 36 percent. Following the twin embarrassments of losing majority status in Parliament and losing the selection for Speaker of the House of Assembly, ZANU-PF can be expected to employ tactics such as intimidation and politicization of food to maintain this seat.

¶ 17. (C) John Makamure, the director of the Center for International Development*a U.S.-funded organization that provides legislative training to the Zimbabwean Parliament*told poloff on September 9 that ZANU-PF was likely to employ youth militia and war veterans to intimidate and harass MDC supporters and eliminate any possibility for MDC to campaign. Makamure, who was also formerly a resident of Gokwe, anticipated that its voters would fall in line behind local ZANU-PF chiefs and would re-elect a ruling party candidate. Neither party has yet to announce their candidates for the Gokwe-Gumunyu seat.

Meanwhile, Detention of MDC MPs Continues

¶ 18. (SBU) The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has continued to harass and arrest MDC-T MPs (reftel B). According to attorney Alec Muchadehama, who is defending the arrested MPs, there are currently two MDC-T MPs in police custody: Bednock Nyaude, Bindura South; and Pearson Mungofa, Highfield East. Both were granted bail by magistrates; however, the government appealed those decisions, and they were remanded to jail, pending a hearing before the High Court.

¶ 19. (SBU) Eliah Jembere (the MDC-T MP arrested on rape charges the morning of Parliament's swearing-in) was released by the ZRP last week. Muchadehama told us that the police returned

to Jembere's residence at 03:00 on September 8, but he was not home. They took his wife into custody instead, but released her that same day. We have repeatedly heard from regular Embassy contacts that the rape charges against Jembere are trumped-up and unlikely to lead to a conviction. In fact, charges against MDC MPs have routinely been dismissed for lack of evidence.

¶10. (SBU) Under Zimbabwean law, if an MP is not present for 21 consecutive days while Parliament is in session, the MP loses his seat and a by-election is held. However, Speaker Lovemore Moyo would likely adjourn Parliament if an MDC-T MP was in danger of losing his seat due to continued police detention.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The loss of Parliament was a shock to ZANU-PF and we expect the party will do what it can to regain a parliamentary majority. A ZANU-PF/MDC power-sharing agreement that resulted in a more relaxed political environment could make these efforts more difficult. END
COMMENT.

MCGEE